



ACC-Panama reflects

by Sp5 Frank Jolley

When one wonders whether or not the military is modernizing itself, he need only look as far as the nearest telephone in Panama.

That telephone can transmit messages to anywhere in Panama in seconds, thanks, in part to a high speed data communications system.

Years ago, far too many for most to remember, the same message would have taken hours, strapped to the leg of a carrier pigeon.

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the U.S. Army Communications Command (now U.S. Army Information Systems Command) this year, the 7th Signal Command activity at Panama paused to reflect on its past.

Striking camp at Camp Gatun, the first canal communicators arrived in 1915. The 3rd Platoon, Telegraph Company H, was that unit. Five months after arriving in March, the unit crossed the canal and headquartered itself at Corozal, its present location.

Closing out 1915 was the introduction of radio communications to the canal area. Radio Company A of the 4th Field Battalion was tasked with that mission.

ACC-Panama was officially born in 1956 when the U.S. Army Strategic Communications Command-South came into being.

Throughout the 50 years of military communications in Panama, equipment has progressed from carrier pigeon through hand-cranked, battery-powered telephones, to the microwave and satellite system used today.

ACC-Panama facilities include ultra-modern electronic switching centers, telecommunications centers and a satellite earth station. The systems span the Isthmus, linking those installations with the United States and other Latin American countries where U.S. embassies and troops are found.

Despite name changes and equipment improvements over the past half century, the mission for the 7th Signal Command activity has remained the same as the host communicator.

ACC-Panama continues to provide access to the Defense Communications Systems for all U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force elements located in Panama, in addition to providing administrative telephone service to the military community.